

Letter from Mabel Hubbard Bell to Eliza Symonds Bell, May 23, 1879, with transcript

Letter from Mrs. Alexander Graham Bell to Mrs. Alexander Melville Bell. Office of
BALTIMORE BOSTON AND PROVIDENCE S.S.CO., Norfolk, Va., May 23, 1879. My dear
Mrs. Bell:

I am much ashamed and very sorry to think how long I have let you wait for Elsie's and my thanks for your very kind and pretty presents. The ten dollars went to buy a United States "baby" bond and the verses are put away to keep until the little one is old enough to read them and know how much her Grandmama loved her. It isn't every day a baby has verses written in her honor, and I am much pleased that Elsie should be among the distinguished few, and thank you very much for taking so much trouble for her.

You must be wondering where we are, I have chosen my paper on purpose. No we are not in Norfolk Virginia nor yet in Boston, Mass from whence this letter will be sent. We left Washington Monday night steamed down the Potomac and Chesapeake Bay to Norfolk, spent an aimless day there waiting for the "Wm. Crane" to take in her cargo of erroneous bales of cotton and countless boxes of strawberries and peas. Such a quantity I never saw before, the whole large building covering at least two acres I should think was full of them, and as fast as the negroes got a space cleared more boxes were brought in my wagons and by boat. The negroes they said had been working thirty-six hours without stopping for food or sleep, at fifteen cents an hour. The strawberries, themselves were selling in Norfolk at five cents a quart, in Boston they will be thirty-five. Beside all these, we are carrying several large cotton spinning machines, and rush bottomed chairs yet they say they have plenty of room for more! The passengers are few and not of the first class, and consequently Alec thinks all the Ship's Officers have stayed behind. We are steered by the mate, and doctored by the stewardess. Alec and I think we are having a smooth

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and quiet passage. Berta and Miss Home and even little Elsie think it much worse than crossing from England, and of the few other passengers seldom more than one at a time appears at table. We are between Martha's Vineyard and the Vineyard Islands now and in smooth water and tomorrow morning at ½ past seven finds us in Boston. We are going to Cambridge to our dear old home, and next week perhaps Mamma and Papa join us for a few days. On the 11th. of June Papa sails for England to look after the English Telephone Co., and our other foreign patents. Poor Papa he dislikes going very much, but they all want him there. It was very hot in Washington and very glad were we all to get away from it and dearly do we hope it will be cool in Cambridge, but they say it was four degrees hotter there than in Washington one day. I suppose you have heard of Annie's leaving me. The new nurse is not nearly so satisfactory a nurse as she but I hope will prove a more even tempered one. That remains to be tried though. Her name of Alice is so like Alec's that he has persuaded her to change it for Adelaide. Poor little Elsie is beginning to have more trouble from her teeth now I fear, she has been perfectly well and happy all spring but today and yesterday she has been cross and fretful and her gums hot. She is just awake now the first time at this time for some months. She shares a broad lower berth with me and at home sleeps in her crib by my bed. I wish you could see her so full of life and spirits strong and unceasingly on the go, her strong young voice seldom quiet. They say when anyone sings she sings too, and she is always trying to imitate others.

I must close now with very much love to you all. Thank Mary for her letter we are so glad if she enjoyed herself. My picture is finished and on exhibition at the gallery. I cannot judge of my own likeness but Elsie's is splendid. There have been several short notes of it in the papers speaking highly of it as an artistic production.

Affectionately yours, May.